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Heritage-Led Urban Regeneration in Rome: Recontextualising the Campo Trincerato through Network Strategies

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ABSTRACT



Contemporary peri-urban landscapes face fragmentation, marginalisation, and the neglect of widespread cultural heritage. This article explores heritage-led regeneration as a strategic framework to revitalise marginal areas by focusing on the Campo Trincerato in Rome, a system of fifteen forts and three batteries constructed between 1877 and 1891. Despite being largely abandoned, these fortifications remain structurally intact and spatially coherent, offering opportunities for reconceptualisation as infrastructural nodes within broader urban and territorial networks. The study adopts a multi-scalar methodological approach, combining architectural analysis of typological and structural features with contextual investigation of accessibility, ownership, and planning frameworks. Results reveal that while the Campo Trincerato maintains its systemic coherence, institutional fragmentation and limited reuse represent major barriers to regeneration. Nevertheless, its configuration as a defensive ring highlights potential to establish cultural polarities, ecological connections, and community-driven functions in Rome's suburban areas. The findings underscore the significance of integrating cultural heritage into contemporary regeneration strategies, transforming neglected military infrastructure into catalysts for urban identity, social cohesion, and sustainable development.

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Highlights:

- Heritage-led regeneration influences social cohesion and territorial identity in marginal peri-urban landscapes.
- Institutional fragmentation constrains the reuse potential of military fortifications as cultural infrastructure.
- Multi-scalar methodological analysis enhances recognition and regeneration potential of 19th–20th century military heritage.
- Network-based recontextualisation strategies strengthen urban regeneration outcomes by integrating cultural, social, and environmental dimensions.

Contribution to the field statement:

This research provides actionable insights for policy and planning by demonstrating how heritage-led regeneration of Rome's Campo Trincerato can address institutional fragmentation and socio-economic marginalisation. By reframing military heritage as infrastructural networks, it offers a replicable approach to integrate cultural assets into urban policies, strengthening identity, cohesion, and sustainable territorial development.

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1. Introduction

Urban regeneration has become a critical policy imperative as cities worldwide grapple with the decline of peripheral areas characterised by economic disinvestment, social exclusion, and physical deterioration (Couch, 2003; Roberts et al., 2017). In many metropolitan contexts, peripheral and peri-urban territories have increasingly emerged as fragile landscapes where structural inequalities converge, producing fragmented settlement fabrics and systemic marginalisation. Over recent decades, regeneration strategies have evolved from an initial emphasis on physical renewal towards integrated models that attempt to incorporate social, cultural, and economic dimensions (Tallon, 2020). Despite this shift, achieving sustainable transformation in marginalised areas remains elusive (Scaffidi et al., 2025).

Contemporary scholarship identifies several persistent obstacles that impede long-term regeneration outcomes. Among the most critical is the difficulty of generating lasting economic opportunities in peripheral locations where structural disadvantage and spatial isolation prevail (Fainstein, 2014). Furthermore, regeneration processes often carry the risk of gentrification, which can displace existing communities and exacerbate inequality (Davidson & Lees, 2010). At the same time, fragmented communities struggle with weakened social ties, making the rebuilding of cohesion and collective identity particularly challenging (Amin, 2002). Together, these factors illustrate the need for regeneration approaches that transcend singular interventions, instead addressing the multidimensional nature of urban marginality while leveraging existing territorial and cultural assets as catalysts for inclusive transformation. The marginality of contemporary peri-urban areas increasingly spans economic, cultural, and environmental dimensions, producing conditions of pervasive insecurity and disintegration that undermine community attachment and identity ties to place (Ricci, 2019). These areas often function as liminal spaces, marked by progressive abandonment, physical deterioration, and socio-economic fragmentation. Consequently, urban regeneration in these contexts is not only a question of spatial reconfiguration but also of cultural and social reintegration.

In this debate, heritage-led regeneration has emerged as a promising strategy for repositioning cultural assets as central drivers of territorial revitalisation (Evans, 2005; Pendlebury et al., 2004; Ricci et al., 2024). This approach proposes that heritage is not simply an object of preservation but a dynamic resource capable of generating economic, social, and cultural value. A growing body of research demonstrates the multifaceted potential of heritage in this regard. Economically, cultural assets can stimulate opportunities through cultural tourism and creative industries (Richards, 2011), contributing to new local production chains while counteracting processes of homologation and delocalisation typical of the globalised economy. Socially, heritage strengthens community identity (Mediani, 2025) and builds social capital by integrating historical dimensions with contemporary aspirations, creating new platforms for dialogue, cooperation, and collective agency in fragmented contexts. Spatially, heritage-led interventions can reshape the urban fabric by producing high-quality public spaces, enhancing liveability, and mending fractures in the settlement pattern. In this way, heritage helps to redefine urban hierarchies and supports the emergence of more balanced polycentric development models.

Yet, despite its promise, heritage-led regeneration literature reveals persistent gaps and contradictions. First, most studies concentrate on high-profile or marketable assets—such as historic centres, cathedrals, or former industrial complexes—while overlooking more challenging heritage types (Ashworth & Tunbridge, 2017; Pendlebury, 2013). These overlooked categories include large-scale infrastructures, modernist ensembles, and particularly military heritage, which often lack obvious cultural appeal or economic potential. Second, existing research tends to analyse heritage in isolation, focusing on individual sites rather than examining broader systemic or networked approaches (Högborg, 2016). This fragmentation has limited understanding of how distributed heritage systems might be leveraged as territorial infrastructures for regeneration.

Military heritage, in particular, has received little sustained attention in urban regeneration debates. Historically designed for concealment, defence, and restricted use, these sites rarely align with conventional cultural heritage paradigms. Their transition into civilian life is complicated by legal

complexities, environmental remediation costs, and uncertainties regarding adaptive reuse (Douthwaite et al., 2024; Bagaeen, 2006). Moreover, while military fortifications were often conceived as interconnected networks with spatial and functional coherence, they are generally approached through piecemeal, site-specific interventions that neglect their systemic character. This disconnect between historical logic and contemporary planning undermines their potential role as structural components in urban transformation. Addressing these gaps requires a conceptual and methodological shift: from perceiving heritage as isolated monuments to recognising it as networked infrastructure embedded within urban, social, and territorial systems. By adopting this perspective, heritage-led regeneration can evolve into a more holistic and transformative strategy, capable of integrating conservation imperatives with socio-economic and spatial development objectives. The challenge lies not only in valorising difficult heritage types but also in situating them within broader debates on marginality, identity, and urban resilience.

This study contributes to these debates by focusing on Rome's *Campo Trincerato*, a nineteenth-century defensive system that illustrates both the limitations and potential of heritage-led regeneration in peripheral urban contexts. By framing the Campo Trincerato as a coherent infrastructural network rather than as isolated artefacts, the research demonstrates how heritage can be repositioned as a catalyst for urban regeneration, social cohesion, and territorial identity, thereby complicating existing narratives and offering a new pathway for heritage-informed urban policy.

2. Modern military fortifications and suburban landscapes

Throughout history, fortifications have played a central role in shaping the cultural and physical landscapes of cities and territories. From antiquity to the contemporary era, societies have constructed systems of territorial delimitation—urban walls, roads, hydraulic networks, and Roman *centuriation*—as instruments to measure, organise, and protect human space (Soja, 2011). Within this broader lineage, fortifications represented not only defensive mechanisms but also markers of identity and symbolic boundaries between the “inside” and the “outside.” The interior space embodied safety, stability, and community, while the exterior signified uncertainty, conflict, and danger. These dualistic representations were continually reshaped in response to evolving military technologies and political dynamics. The nineteenth and twentieth centuries witnessed a dramatic reconfiguration of these traditions. Advances in artillery—particularly rifled guns and explosive projectiles—rendered traditional bastion systems obsolete (Hogg, 1977; Hughes, 1991). In their place, entrenched camps were constructed as complex systems of strategically spaced forts designed for mutual coverage through crossfire. These defensive networks emphasised passive protection, employing reinforced earthworks and subterranean casemates to absorb explosive impacts. Despite their technological sophistication and strategic value, such systems faced structural obsolescence as military doctrines shifted, maintenance costs rose, and geopolitical conditions evolved. By the late nineteenth century, many were gradually decommissioned or abandoned.

Concurrently, modern urbanisation processes reshaped territorial boundaries, dissolving the once-clear demarcations between core and periphery, urban and rural. The expansion of metropolitan areas systematically transcended historical limits—physical, administrative, and cultural—creating diffuse urban forms that eroded the visibility and coherence of historic defensive landscapes (Soja, 2011). As a result, many fortification systems became absorbed into expanding suburban fabrics, losing their original functionality while retaining their spatial imprint. These processes have been particularly evident in European cities, where abandoned military heritage often persists as hidden or forgotten structures within the urban periphery (Colavitti et al., 2021).

Today, nineteenth- and twentieth-century military fortifications remain underexplored in regeneration scholarship. They occupy liminal positions: too recent to be valorised as monumental heritage, too obsolete to be easily adapted, and too complex to be dismissed outright. Their marginalisation within both urban development and heritage policy creates critical gaps in the literature, particularly concerning their potential to serve as cultural infrastructure for contemporary regeneration strategies.

2.1 Reconceptualizing military heritage: from barriers to territorial infrastructure

In their spatial complexity, fortification systems transcend conventional heritage categories. They can be conceptualised not only as architectural artefacts but also as integral components of territorial ontology (Pepe & Vitali, 2022). Their significance extends beyond their original defensive function, embodying a dual epistemological value.

First, they represent an invaluable semiotic archive of territorial signs, deliberately inscribed by past generations as tangible expressions of their spatial, technological, and organisational conceptions. As stratified palimpsests, they document the diachronic evolution of human–geographical relationships, providing rare insights into shifting paradigms of urban defence, control, and identity.

Second, these systems retain morphogenetic capacities, shaping settlement expansion and territorial organisation long after their military function has lapsed. The linear and nodal logic of fortifications—rings, axes, and interlinked strongholds—continues to condition urban growth patterns and infrastructural alignments. Even in contexts of socio-economic transformation, their regulatory influence persists, anchoring development trajectories and preserving latent potential for future reinterpretation.

This dual value requires scholars and practitioners to rethink fortifications not as obsolete relics but as enduring infrastructural frameworks. Reconceptualisation involves moving from an understanding of these sites as barriers—isolated, concealed, and militarised—to recognising them as territorial infrastructures capable of supporting regeneration. When reactivated, they can function as ecological connectors, cultural polarities, and socio-spatial anchors within fragmented peri-urban landscapes.

The transition from historical to contemporary urban models has produced profound disjunctions in how fortifications are treated in planning policies. Typically, intervention strategies operate through sectoral and often conflicting logics: heritage conservation remains isolated from urban development, while social policies rarely integrate cultural or spatial dimensions. This fragmented approach reinforces exclusion, preventing integrated strategies that could reconnect the multiple temporalities embedded in contemporary territories.

Military heritage exemplifies these challenges. Conceived as defensive barriers, these structures were deliberately segregated from civic life. Their subsequent obsolescence reinforced perceptions of isolation, leaving them vulnerable to neglect or piecemeal redevelopment (Bagaeen, 2006). Yet their systemic organisation—as interconnected belts or networks—suggests untapped potential. Reconceptualising fortifications as integrated systems rather than isolated problems enables their transformation into active elements of regeneration strategies.

By reframing these artefacts as infrastructural networks, it becomes possible to overcome the dichotomy between conservation and development. Instead of viewing them as static constraints, they can be mobilised as dynamic frameworks that mediate between heritage protection and urban innovation. This approach aligns with contemporary calls for integrative governance and holistic regeneration strategies capable of addressing multi-scalar urban challenges (Roberts et al., 2017; Pendlebury, 2013).

2.2 Case study selection: the Campo Trincerato of Rome

Rome's *Campo Trincerato* constitutes one of the most extensive and coherent defensive systems built in late nineteenth-century Europe. Constructed between 1877 and 1891, it was designed as a permanent entrenched camp to safeguard the newly proclaimed capital of unified Italy. At the time, Rome's defences relied primarily on the ancient Aurelian Walls, which were inadequate against modern artillery, prompting the construction of a new fortified belt (Fara, 1985; Cajano, 2006, 2022).

The system consisted of fifteen forts and three batteries, strategically distributed to form a defensive ring approximately 40 kilometres in circumference and positioned about 6 kilometres from the city centre (Figure 1). This infrastructural belt not only provided military coverage but also acted as a territorial device of considerable importance, regulating access routes and shaping the peri-urban landscape (Fara, 1985). The names of the forts were derived largely from their locations or from the ancient consular roads they were intended to protect, underscoring their integration into the pre-existing geographical and historical framework of Rome. Their consistent siting along primary routes

and intermediate heights allowed for coordinated territorial control, with each fort placed at an almost regular distance from the others, thereby ensuring a systematic and interdependent network of defence. The strategic positioning of the Campo Trincerato highlighted its dual role: militarily, it functioned as a shield capable of mutual crossfire protection; territorially, it embodied a ring-like infrastructural form that mirrored Rome's historical patterns of urban growth. This duality explains why, even after its decommissioning in the early twentieth century, the system has retained a latent influence on the morphology of the city.

In this regard, the Campo Trincerato offers a particularly valuable case study. Its completeness as a defensive network, its strong territorial imprint, and its current state of marginalisation together provide a critical testing ground for rethinking heritage-led regeneration. Analysing its systemic characteristics allows for the exploration of how military heritage can be recontextualised from obsolete barriers into infrastructural networks capable of supporting cultural, social, and ecological renewal in peri-urban areas.

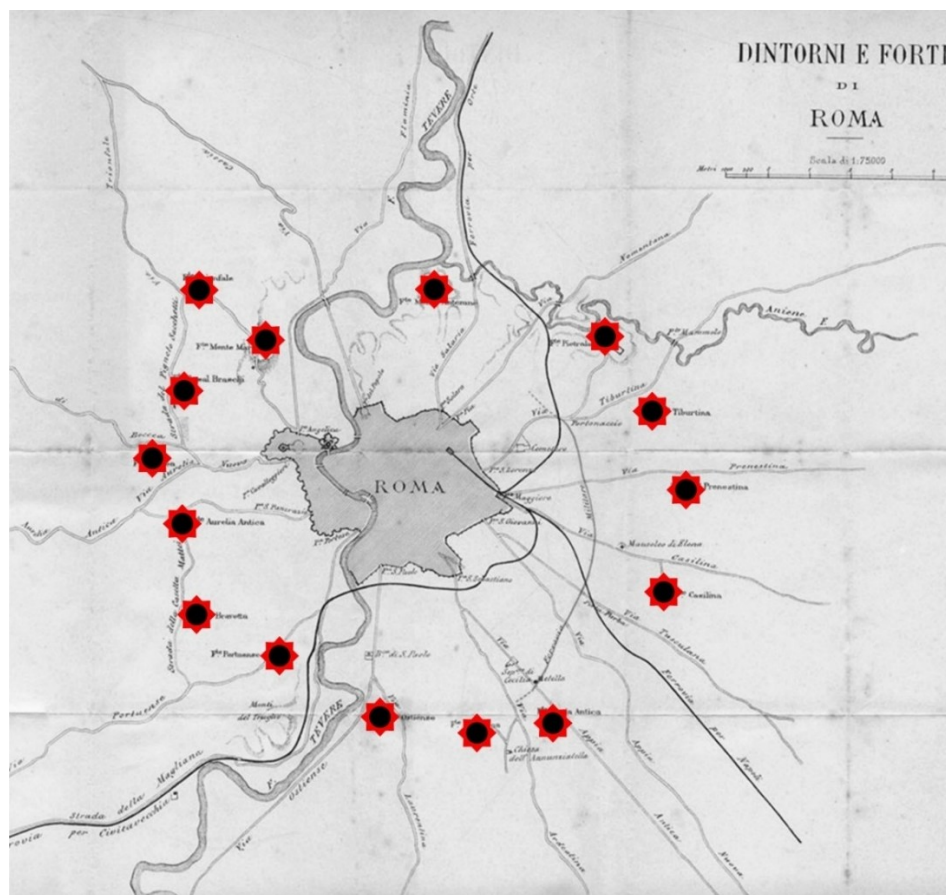


Figure 1. The forts of Rome in 1883.

Source: Elaboration by the authors from *Rerum Romanarum, Storia dei Forti di Roma*.

Today, however, the Campo Trincerato's forts are embedded within the suburban fabric of Rome, reflecting highly heterogeneous conditions of ownership, conservation, and reuse. Some sites remain under the control of military authorities, others have been transferred to municipal ownership but remain abandoned, while a few have been adapted for cultural or community purposes. This fragmented situation exemplifies the broader challenges facing European military heritage: despite their architectural coherence and historical significance, such systems often suffer from institutional fragmentation, neglect, and limited integration into contemporary regeneration strategies (Rossi et al., 2009).

3. Methods

The methodological framework adopted in this research is grounded in a multi-scalar approach to the knowledge and design of modern military fortifications. Given their complexity and systemic nature, the analysis was developed at three distinct but interconnected levels: the individual asset (architectural scale), the local settlement and landscape context, and the urban–territorial level. This hierarchical structure recognises that fortifications are not isolated artefacts but nodes within broader spatial and cultural systems.

3.1 Theoretical orientation

The research contributes to ongoing debates in heritage and urban studies by proposing “heritage networks” as a methodological alternative to site-specific approaches. Rather than focusing solely on the preservation of single forts, the study considers the *Campo Trincerato* as a distributed system with infrastructural coherence. This theoretical contribution emphasises that historically integrated systems, such as nineteenth-century military belts, should be reconceptualised as territorial infrastructures for regeneration. Such a shift aligns with calls in the literature to bridge conservation with socio-economic transformation, positioning heritage as a dynamic force within contemporary regeneration strategies (Pendlebury et al., 2004; Galuzzi & Carollo, 2021).

3.2 Analytical framework

The methodology combined systematic documentation with comparative contextual analysis in order to capture the multifaceted character of the *Campo Trincerato*. Data were collected on the physical, constructional, functional, and ownership characteristics of each fort. This micro-level information was then cross-analysed with local (settlement and landscape) and metropolitan scales to identify network-based models and potential synergies for regeneration.

A comprehensive analytical framework was developed to evaluate the system across two main scales:

- **Architectural scale:**

- ✓ *Typological and structural characteristics* (physical dimension) were documented to understand the evolution of late-nineteenth-century military architecture, including materials, design typologies, and adaptation potential.
- ✓ *Legal and managerial evolution* (administrative dimension) was traced through historical decrees, ownership changes, and governance structures, highlighting institutional fragmentation and barriers to reuse.

- **Urban–territorial scale:**

- ✓ *Localisation, contextualisation, and accessibility* (physical dimension) were analysed through GIS mapping, settlement integration studies, and transport connectivity assessments to identify spatial patterns.
- ✓ *Framing in town planning instruments* (administrative dimension) involved a review of regulatory plans (1931, 1962, 2008) to trace shifting policy approaches and their implications for regeneration.

This dual-dimension matrix (Figure 2) provided a tool for integrating physical–spatial evidence with institutional–regulatory contexts, ensuring a holistic evaluation of both tangible and governance-related factors.

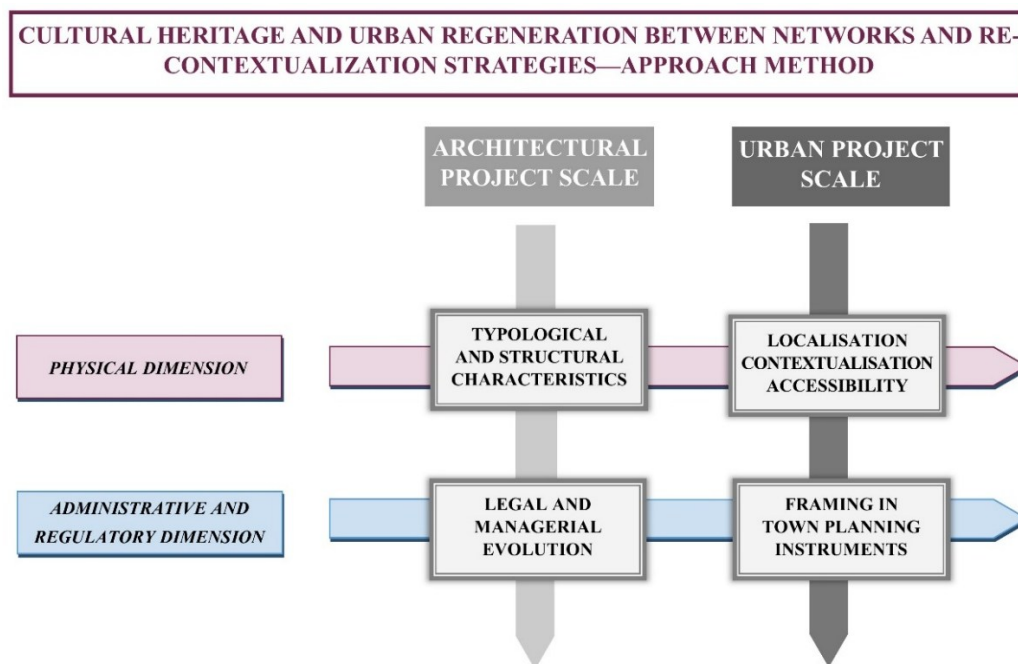


Figure 2. Structure of the study methods.

3.3 Participatory and policy-oriented dimensions

Beyond documentation, the methodology sought to move from passive conservation towards integrated and participatory regeneration. Community involvement and stakeholder dialogue were considered essential for reconnecting military heritage with contemporary urban identity. The approach is ambitious in scope: on one hand, it provides criteria and assessments for administrations tasked with heritage and planning policy, enhancing the recognition of fortifications' *morphogenetic influence* on urban growth; on the other, it outlines practical pathways for involving local communities in regeneration processes, thereby strengthening territorial identity and collective memory (Galuzzi & Carollo, 2021).

3.4 Replicability and transferability

The strength of this methodological approach lies in its replicability for other European contexts. By considering fortifications as territorial phenomena—complex systems composed of interdependent artefacts and relationships—it establishes a template that can be adapted to different historical and geographical settings. The framework not only supports Rome's *Campo Trincerato* but also offers insights into similar military belts across Europe, where conservation challenges intersect with socio-economic and cultural opportunities.

4. Results

As part of the research work, the four aspects that contribute to defining criteria and guidelines for the valorisation and regeneration of the fortification system and to configuring territorial and landscape networks were explored in depth.

4.1 Typological and structural characteristics

Forts have a predominantly trapezoidal and semi-hypogeal structure, with specific architectural and functional characteristics:

- a 'head front' (side facing outwards) between 100 and 200 metres long, garrisoned by numerous artillery posts.
- two oblique sides, also garrisoned by artillery batteries.
- a 'ravine front' (long side) facing the centre of the town, where the entrance to the fort itself was located.

The centre of the main front, as well as all the corners and the entrance gate, were protected by caponiers (semi-circular emplacements where short-range artillery batteries and machine guns were placed).

The few differences between the various forts were, for the most part, related to the characteristics of the territory on which each was erected: for some, the angle of the oblique sides was accentuated or diminished, for others a straight ravine front was preferred, for others still it was structured with a slightly concave ‘V’ shape (‘tenagliato’); in some cases the access was moved to one side of the ravine front rather than to the centre of it; some forts had the ravine front protected by external embankments, others, where the ground did not allow it, had to be protected by armed caponiers, just as some forts had external Carnot walls manned by riflemen, while others had walls uncovered to possible enemy assaults (Chiri et al., 2021; M.G., 2021). These typological and structural characteristics testify to the evolution of 19th-century military architecture in response to innovations in artillery and warfare techniques, making the forts a heritage of considerable interest not only historically but also technologically and constructively (Figure 3).

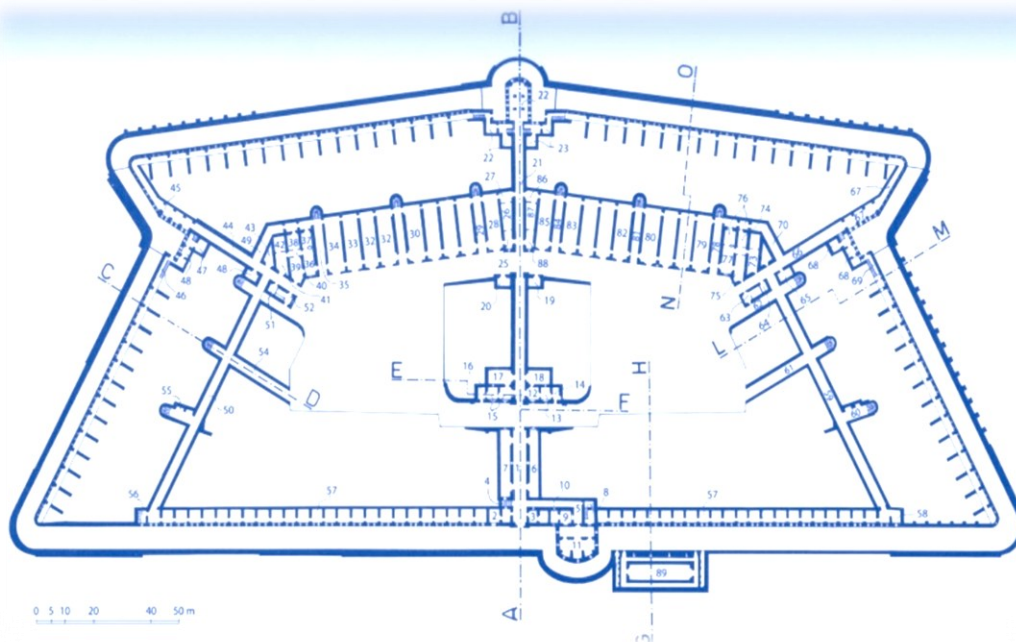


Figure 3. Plan of Forte Prenestino.

Source: Elaboration by the authors from *Rerum Romanarum, Storia dei Forti di Roma*.

4.2 Legal and management evolution

The process of decommissioning the Campo Trincerato formally began in 1919, when a Royal Decree officially removed the capital's fortifications from the list of State fortifications (Fara, 1985). This measure marked the beginning of a long and complex process of transformation in the use and management of these structures.

In the period following its decommissioning, Rome's Campo Trincerato went from being used exclusively for military purposes to being progressively integrated into the urban fabric with a prevalent use as a public green area, sanctioned by urban planning instruments. However, the complex process of clearing and recovery has meant that this transformation is still in progress, with several areas awaiting definitive redevelopment and enhancement in respect of their historical and landscape importance. The presence of landscape and, potentially, historical-artistic constraints represent an important legal instrument for the protection of this heritage (Table 1).

Some forts and areas of the Campo Trincerato were reused by the Ministry of War as warehouses and barracks, maintaining a military destination, albeit different. Gradually, with the urban expansion of Rome, some areas of Campo Trincerato were incorporated into the city fabric, losing their original isolated function. The slow process of removal from state ownership and restoration only began in

1962, also in implementation of the General Regulatory Plan provisions. The transfer of ownership from the State (Ministry of Defence or Agenzia del Demanio) to Roma Capitale was often long and complex, also due to the costs of clearance and recovery of the structures, often in a state of abandonment or partially buried, which represented a brake on their redevelopment.

The complexity of bureaucratic procedures and the fragmentation of institutional competences have further slowed down the redevelopment of this heritage.

Table 1: Ownership and state of law of the forts of Rome.

Forts of Rome	Municipality	Current Use	Restriction	Availability of the property
Monte Mario	I	Italian Army—8th Infrastructure Department	D.M. 06.08.2008	In a state of abandonment
Trionfale	XIV	Italian Public Property Agency—Ex-Barracks “Arnaldo Ulivelli”	D.M. c23.11-2007	Being delivered to Rome Capital, not available
Braschi	XIV	Italian Army—Barracks “Casal Forte Braschi—Nicola Calipari”	D.M. 06.08.2008	Military area
Boccea	XIII	Italian Public Property Agency—Ex-Military Prison Forte Boccea	D.M. 28.04.2008	Being delivered to Rome Capital, hosts cultural events and exhibitions
Aurelia Antica	XII	Italian Finance Police—Barracks “Cefalonia Corfu”	D.M. 11.08.2008	Military area
Bravetta	XII	Italian Public Property Agency	D.M. 28.04.2008	Being delivered to Rome Capital, occasionally open to the public
Portuense	XI	Italian Public Property Agency	D.M. 13.07.1984	Being delivered to Rome Capital, open to the public
Ostiense	IX	Italian Police—Barracks “Forte Ostiense”	D.M. 15.11.1975	Military area
Ardeatina	VIII	Italian Public Property Agency	D.M. 28.04.2008	Being delivered to Rome Capital, not available
Appia Antica	VIII	Italian Air Force—Re.S.I.A.	D.M. 05.08.2008	Military area
Casilina	V	Italian Air Force—Ex-Air Base Centocelle “Francesco Baracca”	D.M. 23.02.1984	Military area (in a state of abandonment)
Prenestina	V	Italian Public Property Agency—CSOA Forte Prenestino	D.M. 28.04.2008	occupied and self-managed social centre
Tiburtina	IV	Italian Army—Barracks “Albanese Ruffo”	D.M. 29.04.2004	Military area
Pietralata	IV	Italian Army—Barracks “Antonio Gandin”	D.M. 23.04.2012	Military area
Monte Antenne	II	Rome Capital, IT	D.M. 06.8.2008	Being delivered to Rome Capital, not available

Some forts are still owned by the State and used by the Ministry of Defence, but the majority, even though they have been handed over to Rome’s capital, are unused and in a state of neglect and degradation.

This condition of marginality of the fortified heritage reflects and at the same time amplifies the socio-economic problems of the peripheral areas in which they are located, creating a vicious circle of neglect and deterioration that involves both the physical structures and the surrounding social fabric. Gradually incorporated into the urban fabric, forts have taken on different functions or have been temporarily abandoned:

- among the forts currently or partially abandoned are Monte Mario, Casilina;

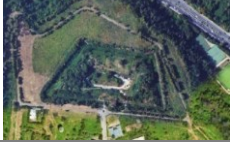
- forts handed over to Roma Capitale include Trionfale, Boccea, Bravetta, Portuense, Ardeatina, Monte Antenne;
- forts used as barracks include Braschi, Aurelia Antica, Ostiense, Tiburtina, Pietralata;
- among the forts used for Air Force activities are Appia Antica, Casilina;
- among the forts, the only one to have assumed the function of a social centre, as a place for sociability, meeting, recreation and organisation of collective time, and for the exchange of ideas, visions, energy and knowledge, is Forte Prenestino.

4.3 Localization, contextualization, accessibility

A second aspect concerned the study of the insertion of the forts into the urban context (Rossi et al., 2009). The extent, altitude of each fort, type of urban context and accessibility were considered. The location and main construction characteristics of the structure were also analysed (Table 2).

Table 2: Localization, contextualization, accessibility.

Forts of Rome	Surface Area (ha)	Altitude (a.s.l.)	Overhead photo	Context	Urban accessibility	Building structure
Monte Mario	8.4	145 m. a.s.l.		urban park	private road transport	hypogeal
Trionfale	21.0	126 m. a.s.l.		urban landscape	metropolitan railway network	semi-hypogeal
Braschi	8.2	98 m. a.s.l.		urban landscape	private road transport	semi-hypogeal with moat
Boccea	7.3	89 m. a.s.l.		urban landscape	Metropolitan network	semi-hypogeal with moat
Aurelia Antica	5.7	85 m. a.s.l.		urban landscape	private road transport	semi-hypogeal with moat
Bravetta	10.6	78 m. a.s.l.		urban park	public transport on separate site	hypogeal with moat
Portuense	5.2	62 m. a.s.l.		urban landscape	private road transport	hypogeal with moat
Ostiense	8.8	36 m. a.s.l.		urban park	Metropolitan network	superficial

Ardeatina	11.2	54 m. a.s.l.		urban park	private road transport	hypogeal with moat
Appia Antica	16.5	76 m. a.s.l.		agricultural landscape	private road transport	hypogeal with moat
Casilina	3.8	50 m. a.s.l.		urban landscape	metropolitan network	hypogeal with moat
Prenestina	13.4	36 m. a.s.l.		urban landscape	metropolitan network	hypogeal with moat
Tiburtina	23.8	32 m. a.s.l.		urban landscape	metropolitan network	hypogeal with moat
Pietralata	25.4	36 m. a.s.l.		urban landscape	private road transport	superficial
Monte Antenne	2.5	65 m. a.s.l.		urban park	private road transport	hypogeal with moat

The Campo Trincerato in Rome, incorporated in the suburban urban fabric, today represents an eloquent palimpsest of urban metamorphoses, (Bevilacqua & Ulivieri, 2023; Spadafora et al., 2023) representing simultaneously:

- a testimonial heritage of late 19th century military architecture;
- a system of artefacts that have progressively lost their original function;
- potential spaces for urban regeneration capable of reactivating territorial connections.

The current condition of the forts reflects the complex dynamics of transformation that run through the urban margins: artefacts of significant historical-architectural value that risk obsolescence and degradation, but at the same time hold extraordinary potential for social and cultural revitalisation.

The refunctionalisation of these fortified systems is therefore a crucial challenge for contemporary urban policies: a challenge that requires integrated approaches capable of combining conservation, innovation, community participation and socio-economic regeneration.

The objective is to transform these spaces from passive heritages to active resources, reconstructing new forms of territorial belonging and social cohesion, while fully respecting their historical stratification and heritage value. Today, these structures, although largely incorporated in the recent process of urban expansion, have remained excluded from reconfiguration and redevelopment processes.

4.4 Framework in municipal town planning instruments

The evolution of the Roman Campo Trincerato's urban role can be analysed through the main planning instruments that have guided the city's development during the 20th and 21st centuries.

The 1931 General Regulatory Plan (PRG) of Rome, drafted under the Fascist Governorship, represents the first urban planning instrument with a vision of the city's expansion outside the Aurelian Walls. The 1931 PRG recognised Rome's Campo Trincerato with a certain ambiguity: although it did not define a clear public destination, it implicitly recognised the potential of these areas, located on the margins of the planned urban expansion, as possible future green spaces or equipment areas, once their primary military function had been surpassed. However, there was no organic and defined strategy for the redevelopment and civil use of the forts and the Campo Trincerato areas. The priority of the 1931 PRG was the monumental expansion of the city and the creation of new neighbourhoods. The 1962 General Regulatory Plan (PRG) of Rome represented a fundamental turning point for the fate of Campo Trincerato. For the first time, a permanent civil function was defined for most of the forts and areas of the Campo, allocating them mainly to Zone N - Public Park. This choice recognised the historical landscape value of these areas and their potential use as important green lungs for the expanding city.

Rome's new General Regulatory Plan (PRG) of 2008 confirmed for the Campo Trincerato areas the destination for public green areas and local public services. Current urban planning regulations place landscape and, potentially, historical-artistic constraints on many of these areas, protecting their integrity and special characteristics, integrating them into the urban fabric and recognising them as important resources for the quality of life of citizens.

A third aspect concerned the planning indications over time, identifying the zoning of the 1931, 1965 and 2008 PRGs (Table 3).

Table 3: Classification of forts in the City Plans of 1931, 1965 and 2008.

Forts of Rome	Zona PRG 1931	Zona PRG 1965	Zona PRG 2008
Monte Mario	Public Park	N - Public parks and sports facilities	Instituted parks
Trionfale	Public Park	N - Public parks and sports facilities	Public services at urban level
Braschi	Public Park	N - Public parks and sports facilities	Public services at urban level
Boccea	Prisons	M - general equipment and services	Public services at urban level
Aurelia Antica	Communal cottages	M - general equipment and services	Instituted parks
Bravetta	<i>Out of paper*</i>	G - private green	Instituted parks
Portuense	<i>Out of paper*</i>	M - local public facilities and services	Public Green and Public Services of local level
Ostiense	<i>Out of paper*</i>	G – Constrained private park	Public services at urban level
Ardeatina	<i>Out of paper*</i>	N - Public parks and sports facilities	Public Green and Public Services of local level
Appia Antica	Respect zone	N - Public parks and sports facilities	Instituted parks
Casilina	Private Park	N - Public parks and sports facilities	Public Green and Public Services of local level
Prenestina	Public Park	N - Public parks and sports facilities	Public Green and Public Services of local level
Tiburtina	Public Park	N - Public parks and sports facilities	Public services at urban level
Pietralata	Public Park	N - Public parks and sports facilities	Instituted parks
Monte Antenne	Private Park	N - Public parks and sports facilities	Historical villas

* Not included in the planning tables

5. Discussions

5.1 Network effects and institutional coordination challenges

This research aimed to activate a process of recognizing the value of fortifications as nodes in a network of physical and intangible relationships, promoting shared paths of valorization and re-

functionalization. The empirical analysis provides mixed evidence regarding this central objective, revealing both the potential and fundamental limitations of the network approach.

The study's implicit hypothesis – that military fortifications can function as integrated territorial infrastructure for urban regeneration – receives partial support from physical evidence but encounters substantial challenges from institutional realities. The documentation confirms that the Campo Trincerato maintains spatial coherence as a territorial system (40km circumference, consistent 6km distance from centre), supporting the theoretical premise of network potential. However, the ownership analysis demonstrates that this historical integration has been systematically dismantled through administrative fragmentation, with assets distributed across seven different institutional entities.

While the historical evidence supports the premise of systematic territorial organization, contemporary conditions suggest that network effects cannot be assumed but must be actively constructed against substantial institutional resistance. This finding supports calls for integrated governance approaches (Roberts et al., 2017) while providing concrete evidence of the institutional barriers that must be addressed.

5.2 Methodological performance and limitations

The dual analysis matrix combines artifact-scale and urban context-scale assessment. Asset-level analysis provides a detailed characterization of individual forts, while urban context mapping reveals integration patterns and accessibility conditions. The systematic documentation approach effectively establishes baseline conditions necessary for regeneration planning, providing comprehensive data about ownership patterns, physical characteristics, and planning evolution.

The comparative analysis tactic across the fifteen forts successfully identifies patterns in ownership transition and physical characteristics, enabling systematic rather than anecdotal assessment. The revelation that 60% of forts remain institutionally fragmented despite decades of public planning designation represents a significant finding about implementation challenges.

The methodological limitations indicate that future research addressing similar aims requires mixed methods approaches combining documentary analysis with stakeholder consultation, process evaluation, and institutional analysis. Future research should balance systematic documentation with detailed process analysis of successful cases.

5.3 Empirical findings and theoretical implications

The systematic documentation reveals three key findings that challenge existing assumptions about military heritage regeneration while providing concrete evidence about institutional and spatial constraints.

First, the ownership analysis (Table 1) demonstrates that institutional fragmentation represents the primary barrier to network-based regeneration, with assets distributed across military agencies (7 forts), public property administration (6 forts), and municipal control (2 forts). These findings challenge theoretical propositions that historical defensive systems can function as integrated territorial infrastructure by providing quantitative evidence of administrative complexity that must be overcome to realize integration.

Second, the physical and contextual analysis (Table 2) reveals significant variation in urban integration despite consistent architectural typology, with surface areas ranging from 2.5ha to 25.4ha and diverse accessibility conditions. This empirical evidence supports Högberg's (2016) critique of heritage network assumptions while demonstrating that network effects require active construction rather than passive recognition of historical relationships.

Third, the planning evolution analysis (Table 3) documents a progressive shift from military to public designation spanning eight decades, yet implementation remains limited despite consistent zoning for public use since 1962. This finding provides specific evidence of temporal mismatch between designation and realization, supporting Pendlebury's (2013) observations about heritage policy implementation gaps while quantifying the scale of the problem.

5.4 Regeneration potential and empirical limitations

The research identifies genuine regeneration opportunities within Rome's Campo Trincerato system while acknowledging significant empirical limitations: without systematic analysis of surrounding community characteristics, local economic conditions, or resident engagement preferences, broader extrapolation remains speculative; the persistence of administrative fragmentation requires active construction rather than passive recognition, with interpretation and community engagement to realize regeneration potential.

Despite its criticalities, Rome's Campo Trincerato system represents an extraordinary opportunity for heritage-led urban regeneration processes (Salmoni, 2024). Its configuration as a ring around the city offers the possibility of:

- create an integrated system of cultural polarities in peripheral areas;
- define a green ring of ecological connection between different parts of the city;
- implement public functions and collective services in areas often lacking in urban facilities;
- developing pilot projects for social and economic reactivation with the involvement of local communities.

The valorisation of this fortified system could be an exemplary case of how cultural heritage can become a strategic element to counter phenomena of urban marginality, promoting territorial identity, social inclusion and local economic development through an integrated approach that overcomes the traditional separation between conservation policies and urban development strategies. A systemic intervention on Rome's Campo Trincerato would represent not only an action to protect a historical heritage of exceptional value, but above all an opportunity to rethink the role of the suburbs in the contemporary metropolitan structure, transforming elements of discontinuity into potential urban, social and cultural connectors.

6. Conclusion

Cultural heritage can broadly be understood as a shared resource and a common good, valued for its intrinsic aesthetic, spiritual, and intellectual dimensions. Within this broader framework, nineteenth- and twentieth-century military fortifications exhibit distinctive characteristics (Vafaie et al., 2023). On the one hand, they constitute a widespread yet often concealed heritage, composed of structures defined more by emptiness than fullness—spatial voids, functional absence, and fragmented relations with the surrounding urban fabric. On the other hand, these fortifications embody multi-scalar forms of architecture that connect the urban dimension with broader territorial and landscape contexts awaiting reinvention and revelation. The regeneration of fortified places thus represents not only an architectural or planning challenge but also a socio-cultural opportunity. It enables the re-establishment of community belonging to the history of twentieth-century landscapes while allowing experimentation with new forms of use. Such interventions can contribute to stitching together fragments of the city and, at the same time, prefigure new urban landscapes enriched with identity and historical continuity. When interpreted systematically through the lens of the “historical frame,” these artefacts can form the structural foundation for restoring urban, environmental, and social quality. In doing so, they become pivotal in reconfiguring fragmented and discontinuous peripheral areas of contemporary cities.

6.1 Valorising fortifications as a structural component of the project

Addressing twentieth-century fortifications as an integral part of modern cultural heritage requires a multidisciplinary approach (Buratti, 2022). It involves more than restoration or preservation; it demands recognition of their historical, architectural, and social significance, along with strategies to ensure their usability and relevance to contemporary communities. The Campo Trincerato in Rome offers an exemplary testing ground for such integrated methodologies. Here, it is possible to move beyond consolidation to embrace environmental, landscape, and social regeneration, thereby redefining architectural and territorial relationships. This approach reveals and recontextualises often inaccessible or faded sites as intelligible and meaningful parts of a new peri-urban landscape. In this way, heritage-led regeneration emerges as an integrative paradigm capable of overcoming the

traditional dichotomy between conservation and innovation, recognising historical stratification not as a limitation but as a valuable resource for building cohesive, sustainable, and vibrant cities.

6.2 Valorising fortifications as a laboratory for social innovation

Reconceptualising the Campo Trincerato fortifications also implies inverting conventional urban planning perspectives. Cultural heritage must no longer be considered solely as a restricted or static object of conservation but as a dynamic laboratory for experimenting with innovative forms of life, production, and coexistence (Roversi et al., 2021). The active participation of local communities in processes of rediscovery, interpretation, and reuse can generate virtuous cycles of social cohesion. Educational and cultural programmes centred on these sites can engage marginalised groups, promote intergenerational and intercultural dialogue, and create new spaces for social interaction within peripheral contexts that are often marked by isolation and fragmentation.

When historic buildings are acknowledged as central components of complex socio-urban ecosystems, collective memory can itself become a driver of sustainable development. Active participation through co-design and consultation ensures the cultural and functional relevance of interventions, transforming fortifications from “islands of the past” into engines of social and urban regeneration (Sokka et al., 2021). To realise this potential, however, an integrated model of welfare that includes culture and landscape is required. Such an approach depends on:

- collaborative multi-level governance involving public institutions, private actors, the third sector, and local communities (Della Spina, 2024);
- flexible and adaptive planning tools that merge conservation with innovation;
- co-design processes that harness both local and professional expertise;
- diversified financing strategies combining public, private, and community resources.

6.3 Valorising fortifications as a leverage for local development

Finally, fortifications should be recognised as structuring infrastructures that can act as levers for local development. Their regeneration is not only linked to environmental and landscape dimensions but also to socio-economic strategies aimed at strengthening cultural identity, stimulating local economies, and reducing inequalities between central and peripheral territories (Tousi et al., 2025). The restoration and reinterpretation of sites such as the Campo Trincerato can reactivate processes of collective identification, thereby reinforcing the bond between community and territory (Roversi et al., 2021). As tangible witnesses of national and local history, these structures provide the foundation for new shared narratives that help counteract the sense of uprootedness common in suburban contexts.

Adaptive reuse of the Campo Trincerato can also generate diversified economic opportunities. These range from the creation of cultural, artistic, and educational hubs to the development of sustainable tourism integrated into metropolitan networks, as well as the establishment of creative industries, artisanal activities, and innovative community services. Contemporary uses may include co-working spaces, cultural welfare services, creative workshops, and circular economy centres (Aldossary et al., 2025). Such enhancements may involve single-site interventions or more complex networked strategies, extending from musealisation to the programming of cultural events, the creation of tourist itineraries, and the revitalisation of surrounding public spaces.

From this perspective, heritage-led regeneration is not confined to physical restoration but constitutes a holistic transformation process. It contributes to rethinking marginal areas comprehensively, fostering urban resilience, social equity, and sustainability. By reconciling the multiple temporalities embedded within contemporary territories, the regeneration of fortifications supports the emergence of new urban policies that integrate conservation, development, and innovation. Further research should deepen the analysis of community engagement practices, governance mechanisms, and financial models to support long-term regeneration. Promising areas of inquiry include comparative studies of military heritage reuse across European cities, the role of digital technologies in participatory planning, and the integration of ecological infrastructure with cultural heritage systems. Such research would not only enrich theoretical frameworks but also provide practical tools to guide policy-makers and practitioners in scaling up heritage-led regeneration strategies.

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Conflicts of Interest

The Authors declare that there is no conflict of interest.

Data availability statement

Data available on request from the authors.

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This study did not require ethical approval as it does not involve human or animal subjects.

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